

8 March 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR: Executive Director-Comptroller  
SUBJECT : Archives, History, and Records  
REFERENCE : Proposed Memorandum from Addressee  
to Four Deputy Directors

1. As requested I have examined with care your proposed memorandum on the above subject, which I received on 6 March. Since it is my understanding that the subject is on the agenda for the Deputies' meeting of 8 March, it is not possible to submit comments in as complete a manner as I would like. I am therefore commenting topically on your memorandum in a somewhat informal and compressed manner, by identifying portions with which I concur and those concerning which I have doubts or alternate suggestions.

2. I of course agree that there is a basic relationship between history and archives and records, which justifies their being considered together in the Agency planning. There are also some differences, as I shall indicate below.

3. I concur fully that any program developed in this area must take into account the current pressures on Agency resources.

4. Even if resources were readily available, I would have reservations about writing history merely to meet contingency requirements. It is necessary to preserve records to meet contingencies. Finished histories, in my judgment, should be less concerned with contingencies than with providing conclusions that are of use to management.

5. Unquestionably all three programs require strict compartmentation and application of the principle of need to know.

6. There is, as suggested, a relationship between compartmentation and decentralization. I am happy that the memorandum is stated in terms of much rather than complete decentralization. If we are, because of resource constraints, and for other reasons, to entrust the preservation of records and the writing of history to non-professionals, then these persons need effective professional guidance and direction, which by necessity includes a measure of centralization. Our experience has shown, however, that a small Historical Staff can guide and direct a considerable number of writers. The same can be said for records management and archival programs.

7. Records are generated at an enormous rate in the Agency and since our primary concern is with intelligence, the value of these records declines rapidly. Some can be disposed of quickly but others must be retained for varying lengths of time, during which it is important that they be kept securely but in a manner which facilitates reasonably rapid retrieval. Experience with the historical program indicates that while a high volume of records has on the whole been preserved, practices have differed widely between components; some have kept too few records; others have not kept those needed for historical writing. Components therefore need more guidance concerning which records to preserve and in the making of schedules for the retention and destruction of records. The addition of a professional archivist and a professional historian to the present Records Management Board should strengthen the Board and facilitate its improvement of selection and retention procedures, as should the provision for the Board to report directly to the Executive Director.

8. Provision for an Agency Archivist will hopefully bring professional support to the planning and implementation of the proposed Archives program,

but in my judgment the Archivist may not be able to accomplish much if he is to be made dependent for staff on the support of the present Records Management Officers responsible primarily to the Directorates. The Agency Archivist should be appointed as soon as possible, from outside the Agency. He should be a professional archivist, and have served in the National Archives or a comparable archive. The Archivist should participate in the selection of the Directorate Archivists, who should be clearly part of his team, subordinate to him, and if necessary, removable by him.

9. In view of the current resource stringency, one of the major features of the memorandum is of course the provision to substitute Annual Reports for office histories, in order to permit the operation of the Historical Program with fewer people, and to focus instead on analytical histories of significant Agency activities. I of course subscribe fully to the idea of producing a better program with a smaller effort, but I believe that this proposal needs further consideration before recommending it to the Deputy Directors as a substitute for component histories. It is now and has been for a number of years standard practice for each component of the Agency responding to the annual Program Call, to submit a report on the progress it has made in fulfilling its stated objectives. These reports are generally summary in nature and emphasize production statistics where applicable. They are pro forma statements which follow the activity guidelines employed in the forward looking parts of the planning process. Since these papers are coupled to the PPB budget exercise they are not objective historical accounts but presentations intended to defend and sustain the activity of the reporting component. Once prepared, these documents become a part of the historical record and should be incorporated into that record. For this reason it is in a sense appropriate that this proposal be discussed in the memorandum between the sections on Records Management and Archives, but apart from the section on History. Improvement of these papers with guidance from PPB should make them more useful to PPB in preparing the overall Agency budget proposal. As a historian I regard these annual reports as useful historical source material and I would like


to work with PPB in enhancing their quality. I do not regard such annual compilations as substitutes for component histories, any more than I would equate the annual submission of the President to Congress on the state of the Union with a history of the United States for that period, nor the report of a corporation president to its stockholders as a history of the company. Historians employ annual reports as sources in writing history, but historians do not write their own histories as a series of annual increments. For these reasons, while I would like to cooperate with PPB in improving the utility of the present system of annual reports, I believe it may also be advisable to employ other means to focus the energy of the historical effort on analyses of Agency activities and programs, as advocated in the penultimate paragraph of the memorandum.

10. I am of course happy that your memorandum directs that the emphasis of the ongoing Historical Program be placed on key operations and activities, cutting across individual components where appropriate. Too much attention was given to structural history before I became Chief of the Historical Staff. I have been trying to deemphasize that kind of history in favor of a functional and topical approach. Eventually, in my judgment, there will again be a need to write component histories, even if the quality of the annual reports is enhanced. Who will want to read ten annual reports to brief himself on the history of a component? When this need is again felt, I would satisfy it by means of component histories which emphasize activities, as do a number of the nominally titled office histories in the DDI. An office or station history should not be written as chronicle or chronological history. Every history should include the discussion of the ambience or setting; it should focus on development and trace changes over time; account for the changes that take place; and analyze and describe the significance of what has occurred.

11. As the Agency moves into a program which focuses on key activities, it is of course important to maintain security and compartmentation at high levels, both in the production of histories and in their control after they are completed. Both of these matters receive very careful attention from the Historical Staff. It will

be essential, in order to achieve the level of quality which the Agency needs, that all histories undertaken in the Agency be included in its formal Historical Program, receive guidance from the Historical Officer of the Directorate, and from the Chief and Deputy Chief of the Historical Staff, and when completed, be subject to the approval both of the producing component and the Chief of the Historical Staff.

12. In summary there are a number of proposals in the above memorandum which I feel require further staffing. Would it be possible to defer presentation of the memorandum at the Deputies' meeting until there is opportunity for additional consideration?

  
Howard M. Ehrmann  
Chief, CIA Historical Staff

25X1